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**Testimony of
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Submitted to the
Appropriations Committee,
Conservation and Development Subcommittee
March 2, 2015**

Re: Governor's Recommended Budget: Department of Economic and Community Development

Senators Bye and Kane, Representatives Walker and Ziobron, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW).

I am testifying today with concerns about the proposal to eliminate funding for the Women's Business Development Council (WBDC). The WBDC's mission is "to help women achieve economic self-reliance by educating and counseling them to start and grow businesses, resulting in job creation and community vitality." They are the only organization in Connecticut dedicated to helping women entrepreneurs successfully start and grow their own businesses by providing a continuum of direct services including professional, business and career counseling, practical financial management and budgeting, technical assistance, and access to capital.

The PCSW supports the work of the WBDC not simply because their mission is to serve women and women-owned businesses, but because business ownership is a key piece of economic equity for women. According to the PCSW-commissioned report, *The Status of Women in Connecticut's Workforce* (PCSW and Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2014), Connecticut women still only make 78% of what men make and the gap is even more pronounced for women of color. Furthermore, women are far more likely to work part-time, thus decreasing their earnings and professional growth potential, due to child care or other personal obligations than are men - 27% of

women who work part time cited child care problems and family obligations as the reason for working part-time, compared with only 3% of men (PCSW and IWPR, 2014).

These are not abstract statistics to us. As an agency, we've worked with the WBDC on roundtables, hearing firsthand the concerns of businesswomen – from those who suffer discrimination in the workplace to those who are having trouble securing the capital needed to expand their business. I have seen how the WBDC reaches out to women who comprise a wide business spectrum – from precarious to flourishing.

The work of the WBDC is critical, because business ownership and self-employment offer many women the opportunity for economic self-sufficiency and increased control over their work and family lives. It can be a viable alternative to a job market that offers few opportunities for advancement and little flexibility. Yet still today, women find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to several key factors necessary to successfully starting and growing their own businesses, including personal and business financial literacy and access to credit, capital and networks. Through workshops, one-on-one customized coaching, in-classroom and online training, WBDC provides the skills, knowledge, opportunities and relationships that historically have been more difficult for women to access.

According to the WBDC, the organization reaches almost every Connecticut community serving more than 1,800 individuals and businesses, representing a 20% increase over 2013. Over 50 percent of WBDC's clients are low- to moderate-income and nearly 10% are female single heads-of-household, while 36% are racial and ethnic minorities. These clients are in your communities and are seeking a better, economically secure future for themselves and their families.

The WBDC has a proven track record of success, having been funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration for over 17 years and recognized as one of the top ten business centers in the nation. According to WBDC, their clients businesses outperform national averages on several indicators including average number of employed staff per business and reported gross revenue.

The work of the WBDC and the funding that the state has generously provided in the past should not be regarded as a luxury that we cannot afford in tough budget times. It is exactly in these tough times that we cannot afford not to fund the work of the WBDC. Women's continued economic progress is a key factor in Connecticut's continued economic recovery, and the WBDC plays a critical role in ensuring that success.